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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine if students' definitions of reading and self-perceptions/attitudes as readers are related to word recognition and comprehension performances. The study also examined if students' definitions of reading were related to a tendency to exhibit learning difficulties. Subjects were the entire third-grade population (164 students) at a K-4 elementary school located in a small town in the southern region of the United States. Results indicated a significant difference between students' definitions of reading and comprehension performances as measured by an informal assessment, but no significant difference was found for comprehension performance on formal assessments, definitions of reading, and word recognition performance. Both positive and negative correlations were found between the Reader Self-Perception Scale scores and subjects' comprehension performance. A significant difference was found between subjects' general and physiological states as self-perceptions as readers and the passed and failed groups for learning disabilities. No significant difference was found between students' self-perceptions as readers and the passed and failed groups for learning disabilities or definitions of reading. Findings suggest that subjects': (1) definitions of reading were related to comprehension performance as measured by an informal reading assessment; (2) definitions of reading and self-perceptions have little effect on word recognition performance; (3) comprehension was not related to self-perceptions as readers; (4) self-perceptions as readers were related to the tendency to exhibit learning difficulties; and (5) self-perceptions as readers were not related to definitions of reading. (Contains 42 references and 11 tables of data.) (Author/CR)

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Running Head: DEFINITIONS, SELF-PERCEPTIONS, AND COMPREHENSION

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THIRD GRADE STUDENTS' DEFINITIONS OF READING, SELF-PERCEPTIONS AS READERS, AND THEIR READING PERFORMANCE

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine if students' definitions of reading and self-perceptions/attitudes as a readers are related to word recognition and comprehension performances. Additionally, this study sought to examine if students' definitions of reading were related to a tendency to exhibit learning difficulties. The subjects in this study consisted of the entire third grade population (i.e., 164 students) at a K-4 elementary school located in a small town in the southern region of the United States.

Results indicated that there was a significant difference between students' definitions of reading and comprehension performances as measured by an informal assessment, but no significant difference was found for comprehension performance on formal assessments, definitions of reading, and word recognition performance. Both, negative and positive correlations were found between the Reader Self-Perception Scale scores and third grade students' comprehension performance. In addition, a significant difference was found between the third grade students' general and physiological states as self-perceptions as readers and the passed and failed groups for learning disabilities. No significant difference was found between students' self-perceptions as readers and the passed and failed groups for learning disabilities or definitions of reading.

Thus, results would tend to support the notions that third grade students': (a) definitions of reading were related to comprehension performance as measured by an informal reading assessment; (b) definitions of reading and self-perceptions have little effect on word recognition performance; (c) comprehension was not related to self-perceptions as readers; (d) self-perceptions as readers were related to the tendency to exhibit learning difficulties; and (e) self-

perceptions as readers were not related to definitions of reading.

Introduction

Learning to read for the majority of school-age students in the United States is achieved with minimal difficulty. Yet, a small percentage of students experience reading difficulties. However, through the course of educating students, the degree to which reading is achieved varies, and the further along this continuum one progresses the greater the incidence of reading failure. It is within this variability that students become designated as either "good" or "poor" readers by their respective teachers. The notion of "good" or "poor" readers is a unique qualification that often relates more to the student's ability in learning to read in a given school/grade and not their ability in learning to read over time.

Students who experience difficulty in learning to read through their schooling experience not only the personal struggle of coping with the educational system, but also the stigma of failure. This lack of ability often causes students to develop low self-esteem or to have less than favorable perceptions of themselves as learners. For many, "the ultimate stigma of failure for children is to be called learning disabled or dyslexic, *handicaps* characterized by not being able to read well" (McGill-Franzen & Allington, 1991b, p. 88). This stigma often follows a student throughout his or her academic life with the ultimate rationalization for administration, teachers, students, and parents to desire less than what is acceptable or expected of the student involved.

In addition to the academic and social stigmas attached to students with reading problems, which often coincide with poor self-perceptions as learners, a variety of descriptive terms have evolved which are often used interchangeably to describe the difficulties students experience with reading. Examples of such terms include dyslexia, learning disability, developmental dyslexia or specific developmental dyslexia, and specific reading disability

(Ackerman & Dykman, 1993; Bashir & Scavuzzo, 1992; Clark & Uhry, 1995; Cox, 1983; Critchley, 1981; Doehring, Patel, Trites, & Fiedorowicaz, 1981; Eisenberg, 1966; McMenemy, 1969; Pavlidis & Miles, 1981; Satz, Rardin, & Ross, 1971; Sawyer, 1993; Stanovich, 1989a). While such descriptive terminology exists, it has not proven beneficial in providing information about students' reading difficulties or, more specifically, their treatments (i.e., professionals often diagnose but provide no treatment/cure in hopes that educators responsible for the teaching of the children will have the means to deal with the situation).

To add to the problem, state and federal authorities have mandated pieces of legislation designed to force educators to identify, label, and place students with learning difficulties (e.g., dyslexia) in the most appropriate environment, with the intent that classroom instruction would change to meet the needs of these students. In reality, these pieces of legislation mandated who would be placed but not what would happen once placement occurred. Student placement was often based on performance of standardized reading assessments, which measure a narrow range of skills, vary in what they intend to measure, and focus on the variance between reading achievement and chronological age, mental age, or grade level (Catts, 1989; Weaver, 1994b). As a result of these laws and the criteria used for identification of learning difficulties (e.g., dyslexia), the number of students eligible for special services served within general education classrooms has skyrocketed (Allington & Magill-Franzen, 1989; McGill-Franzen & Allington, 1991a). Currently, the population of special education students has escalated but federal and state regulations have done little to provide the necessary format and foundation for addressing these special needs in the classroom.

Despite federal and state legislation, identifying students with learning difficulties (e.g.,

dyslexia) has proven to be difficult, time consuming, costly, and controversial. Essentially, a diagnosis of learning difficulties (e.g., dyslexia) seems to depend on the criteria used for identification and the professional evaluator's definition. In addition, this controversy is exacerbated by the teacher's knowledge or lack of knowledge regarding the reading process, one's definition of reading, and the teaching practices selected for the classroom (Weaver, 1994a). Despite the teacher's training and expertise in reading instruction, federal and state legislation has interfered with decisions regarding student placement, but has not aided the teacher with recommendations for addressing the needs of poor readers, as evidenced by the ever-increasing number of students identified for special services and students' failure to learn to read. Therefore, it behooves teachers to evaluate students' reading progress based on sound theory, appropriate instruction, and good teaching practices, rather than the discrepancy between standardized test results and the student's chronological age, mental age, or grade level.

In order for students to succeed in reading, a teacher's definition of reading is fundamental. Weaver (1994a) has stated that reading instruction depends upon the teacher's definition of reading which can be categorized into one of three groups, those being: (1) code emphasis, (2) skills emphasis, or (3) meaning emphasis. A code-emphasis definition focuses on letters and sound/letter units. A skills-emphasis definition focuses on an adequate sight word vocabulary, word attack skills presented in a hierarchically arranged sequence, and letter/sound correspondence. A meaning-emphasis definition focuses on processing text for meaning (DeFord, 1985; Felton, 1993). In addition, a student's definition of reading is directly influenced by the teacher's definition, and, ultimately, his or her definition will be impacted by the type of instruction he or she has received and his or her application of reading strategies (Weaver,

1994b). Although experts in the field of reading insist that a student's definition of reading is important, limited research has been conducted which investigated the impact the student's definition has upon reading behavior and/or reading ability.

Reading educators and researchers have investigated students' attitudes toward reading and perceptions of reading to assist teachers in an attempt to promote a positive learning environment. Little research has focused on students' attitudes, values, opinions, ambitions, and motivations regarding reading and the influence that affective factors seem to have on reading performance (Henk & Melnick, 1995). While limited research has focused upon students' attitudes toward reading and their self-perceptions as readers, the impact of these affective factors combined with students' definitions of reading has no empirical data to support their effect upon reading ability.

Despite the knowledge educators and researchers have obtained regarding reading and the affective factors which influence reading, an ever-increasing portion of the school population continues to experience difficulty learning to read. Simmons (1992) stated that "although all students [including students with learning disabilities and dyslexia] are acknowledged to be different, it has been assumed that they learn to read using the same methods" (p. 69). Enfield (1988) suggested that intrinsic physiological differences in some students inhibit them from learning through a traditional reading approach. This implies that traditional methods should be modified to meet the challenge of various reading tasks and to meet the needs of students' strengths and weaknesses, which differ in type and severity. Therefore, to mandate or use of one sole method for teaching and/or remediating reading for general education students and students with learning disabilities and/or dyslexia is not recommended. Educators must provide

alternative instructional methods of teaching (Enfield, 1988), which include a variety of reading approaches, ranging from an integrated to a multisensory reading approach to an integrated curriculum approach. These approaches have been designed and recommended for teachers' use to enhance and encourage reading abilities for students experiencing difficulties.

Regardless of a student's disability, the ultimate goal for all students is to be independent, self-monitoring, and active comprehenders. Therefore, neither federal nor state regulation/ policy can be adopted to correct reading difficulties; only instruction that is not confined to the standard curriculum (i.e., curriculum established by accepted usage) can assist students with learning difficulties (i.e., dyslexia) (McGill-Franzen & Allington, 1991a).

Method

Subjects

The subjects in this study consisted of the entire third grade population at a K-4 elementary school. The total number of subjects was 164 third grade students in eight self-contained classrooms. The subjects consisted of two classifications of students: (a) general education students from predominantly low- to middle-income families, and (b) students from predominantly low- to middle-income, some of whom had been identified as learning disabled or dyslexic under Section 504 by the state department of education.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected by the principal investigator, who administered individually the following informal assessments: the Reading Questionnaire (RQ), the Slosson Oral Reading Test (SORT), the Analytical Reading Inventory (ARI), and, the Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS). These assessments provided data regarding reader attitude and self-perception, comprehension

performance, approximate reading level, and strengths and weaknesses for each subject. The formal assessment, the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), was administered by the local school in the Fall of the previous year.

Analysis of the Data

Data Analysis

A variety of data analysis procedures were used to compare third grade students' reading comprehension as measured by the Analytical Reading Inventory (ARI) and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) for selected-response (advanced normal curve equivalent & total normal curve equivalent) and constructed-response (global, interpretive, & response to meaning).

A summary of the one-way analysis of variance for comprehension scores as measured by the ARI and students' reading definitions is presented in Table 1. A significant difference in the ARI reading comprehension scores was found between the students' reading definition groups $F(3, 160) = 3.56$, $p < .03$.

Table 1

Summary of One-way (ANOVA)--Comparing the ARI Scores of the Four Reading Definition Groups (RD)

Source	df	MS	F	p
Between Groups	3	37.89	3.56	< .03
Within Groups	160	10.64		

Group means and standard deviations for the ARI comprehension scores are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Comparison of Reading Definition Groups by ARI Comprehension Performance

	Mean	SD	N
Phonics/Word Recognition	3.53	4.04	34
Word Recognition and Meaning	5.22	7.04	9
Meaning	2.97	3.13	64
Other	1.95	2.61	57

* df = 3/160

Multiple comparisons using the Newman-Keuls test indicated that the word recognition and meaning group had significantly higher ($p < .05$) mean ARI comprehension scores than the other group. No other significant differences were found between the other four groups.

The results of the comparison of the four RD groups for comprehension as measured by the ITBS and reading definitions are presented in Table 3. No significant differences in the RD groups were found on the ITBS (Reading Advanced Normal Curve Equivalent) F (3, 160) = 2.44, $p > .05$ or on the ITBS (Total Normal Curve Equivalent) F (3, 160) = 2.12, $p > .05$.

Table 3

Summary of One-way (ANOVA)--Comparing the Reading Comprehension (ITBS Reading Advanced Normal Curve Equivalent & Total Normal Curve Equivalent) of the Four Reading Definitions' Groups

Source	df	MS	F	p
Advanced Normal Curve Equivalent				
Between Groups	3	770.64	2.44	.06
Within Groups	160	315.44		
Total Normal Curve Equivalent				
Between Groups	3	803.16	2.12	.09
Within Groups	160	378.70		

The mean scores for the RD groups on the ITBS selected-response items by group are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Comparison of Reading Definition Groups by ITBS (Advanced Normal Curve Equivalent & Total Normal Curve Equivalent) Comprehension Performance

	Mean	SD	N
Advanced Normal Curve Equivalent			
Phonics/Word Recognition	41.26	16.00	34
Word Recognition and Meaning	55.44	16.00	9
Meaning	40.17	17.00	64
Other	38.30	18.00	57
Total Normal Curve Equivalent			
Phonics/Word Recognition	40.97	17.00	34
Word Recognition and Meaning	50.33	25.00	9
Meaning	34.91	20.00	64
Other	36.26	18.00	57

The multivariate comparison of the RD groups on the ITBS global, interpretive, and response to meaning variable was not significant F (9,385) = 0.86, NS. The results of the univariate group comparisons are presented in Table 5. No significant differences were found.

Table 5

Summary of Univariate One-way (ANOVA)--Reading Comprehension (ITBS Global, Interpretive, and Response to Meaning) and Reading Definition Groups

Source	df	MS_A	MS_W	F	p
ITBS					
Global	3/160	3.32	4.11	.81	.49
Interpretive	3/160	1.26	1.05	1.19	.31
Response to Meaning	3/160	2.19	1.91	1.14	.33

The means for the ITBS global, interpretive, and response to meaning scores by group are shown in Table 6.

Table 6

Comparison of Reading Definition Groups by ITBS (Global, Interpretive, & Response to Meaning) Comprehension Performance

	Mean	SD	N
Global			
Phonics/Word Recognition	7.56	2.06	34
Word Recognition and Meaning	7.22	1.30	9
Meaning	7.14	1.82	64
Other	6.88	2.29	57
Interpretive			
Phonics/Word Recognition	5.91	0.97	34
Word Recognition and Meaning	6.00	1.00	9
Meaning	5.75	1.15	64
Other	5.54	0.91	57
Response to Meaning			
Phonics/Word Recognition	5.56	1.26	34
Word Recognition and Meaning	6.44	1.59	9
Meaning	5.70	1.50	64
Other	5.56	1.28	57

A one-way analysis of variance was used to compare the differences between the four reading definition groups the word recognition scores from the Slosson's Oral Reading Test

(SORT). A summary of this one-way analysis of variance is shown in Table 7.

Table 7

Summary of One-way ANOVA--Word Recognition (SORT) and Reading Definition Groups

Source	df	MS_A	MS_W	F	p
SORT	3/160	1835.73	777.44	2.36	.07

The results indicated that no significant difference $F(3, 160) = 2.36$, $p > .05$ was found between students' reading definitions (skills, combination, meaning, & other) and their word recognition performance on the SORT.

The SORT means and standard deviations for the four RD groups are presented in Table 8.

Table 8

Comparison of Reading Definition Groups by Word Recognition (SORT)

	Mean	SD	N
Phonics/Word Recognition	84.09	27.39	34
Word Recognition and Meaning	97.11	36.66	9
Meaning	83.02	29.33	64
Other	74.26	24.89	57

A Pearson correlation procedure was used to compare third grade students' reading comprehension as measured by the ARI and ITBS selected-response and constructed-response

items, and their scores from the Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS--general, observational comparison, social feedback, physiological states, & progress). The intercorrelations for reading comprehension scores and self-perceptions scores are presented in Table 9.

Significant negative correlations were obtained and compared between the variables of IRP (-.17, $p < .05$), OC (-.20, $p < .05$), PS (-.16, $p < .05$), PR (-.22, $p < .01$), and students' comprehension performance for the advanced reading normal curve equivalent scores. Significant negative correlations were found between the OC (-.21, $p < .05$), PS (-.23, $p < .05$), PR (-.21, $p < .01$), and students' comprehension performance for the total reading normal curve equivalent scores.

Table 9

Comparison of Correlations between Reader Self-Perception and ARI Comprehension Performance (N = 164)

Variables	ARI	ANCE	TNCE	ITBS 1	ITBS 2	ITBS 3	Mean	SD
IRP	.10	-.16*	-.13	.10	.04	.04	1.69	1.00
OC	-.04	-.19**	-.20**	.07	-.07	-.05	15.82	5.58
SF	-.10	-.05	-.08	.02	-.02	-.13	16.97	6.61
PS	-.15*	-.15*	-.23**	-.00	-.12	-.11	13.49	5.67
PR	-.17**	-.22**	-.20**	-.08	-.14	-.07	16.68	7.10
Mean	2.85	40.59	37.48	7.14	5.73	5.67		
SD	3.34	17.99	19.65	2.02	1.03	1.38		

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$

Note
ARI = Analytical Reading Inventory
ANCE = Advanced Normal Curve Equivalent
TNCE = Total Normal Curve Equivalent
ITBS 1 = Global
ITBS 2 = Interpretive
ITBS 3 = Response to Meaning
Individual Reading Perception = General
OC = Observational Comparison
SF = Social Feedback
PS = Physiological States
PR = Progress

Independent groups' t-tests were used to evaluate the self-perceptions scores from the RSPS (general, social feedback, observational comparison, physiological states, & progress) and pass/fail groups based on the Dyslexia Screening Instrument (DSI). The results indicated that a significant difference was found t (147) = 2.18, $p < .05$ between the IRP self-perceptions as readers and the passed and failed groups for learning disabilities, with the failed group possessing the highest mean, as measured by the DSI (Table 10). Second, no significant difference was found t (147) = 1.56, NS between the OC and the passed and failed groups for learning disabilities, as measured by the DSI. Third, no significant difference was found t (147) = 1.84, NS between the third grade students' social feedback and the passed and failed groups for learning disabilities, as measured by the DSI. Fourth, a significant difference was found t (147) = 2.06, < p.05 between the third grade students' physiological states and the passed and failed groups for learning disabilities, with the failed group possessing the highest mean, as measured by the DSI. Last, a significant difference was found t (147) = 2.66, < p.05 between the third grade students' progress and the passed and failed groups for learning disabilities, as measured by the DSI.

Table 10

Summary of Independent t-tests for Reader Self-Perception Scale (General) and Dyslexia Screening Instrument (Failed or Passed)

Group		N	Mean	SD	t	df	p
IRP							
	Passed	114	1.56	.91	-2.18	147.	.03
	Failed	35	1.97	1.15			
Observational Comparison							
	Passed	114	15.46	5.40	-1.56	147.	.12
	Failed	35	17.14	6.25			
Social Feedback							
	Passed	114	16.36	6.33	-1.84	147.	.06
	Failed	35	18.69	7.14			
Physiological States							
	Passed	114	12.82	4.94	-2.06	147.	.04
	Failed	35	14.91	6.16			
Progress							
	Passed	114	15.65	6.28	-2.66	147.	.01
	Failed	35	19.09	7.91			

Note: IRP = Individual Reading Perception

A multivariate one-way analysis of variance procedure was used to compare scores from the RSPS by self-perception group (general, social feedback, observational comparison, physiological states, & progress) with definition scores from the Reading Questionnaire (RQ). A summary of this multivariate one-way analysis of variance (MANOVA) is shown in Table 11.

Table 10

Summary of Independent t-tests for Reader Self-Perception Scale (General) and Dyslexia Screening Instrument (Failed or Passed)

Group		N	Mean	SD	t	df	p
IRP							
	Passed	114	1.56	.91	-2.18	147.	.03
	Failed	35	1.97	1.15			
Observational Comparison							
	Passed	114	15.46	5.40	-1.56	147.	.12
	Failed	35	17.14	6.25			
Social Feedback							
	Passed	114	16.36	6.33	-1.84	147.	.06
	Failed	35	18.69	7.14			
Physiological States							
	Passed	114	12.82	4.94	-2.06	147.	.04
	Failed	35	14.91	6.16			
Progress							
	Passed	114	15.65	6.28	-2.66	147.	.01
	Failed	35	19.09	7.91			

Note: IRP = Individual Reading Perception

A multivariate one-way analysis of variance procedure was used to compare scores from the RSPS by self-perception group (general, social feedback, observational comparison, physiological states, & progress) with definition scores from the Reading Questionnaire (RQ). A summary of this multivariate one-way analysis of variance (MANOVA) is shown in Table 11.

Table 11

Summary of Univariate One-way (ANOVA--Reader Self-Perception and Reading Definition

Source	df	MS_A	MS_W	F	p
Self-Perception					
General	3/160	1.01	1.01	0.25	NS
PR	3/160	75.25	49.88	1.51	NS
OC	3/160	17.13	31.44	0.54	NS
SF	3/160	47.39	43.55	1.09	NS
PS	3/160	63.41	31.61	2.01	NS

Note: Individual Reading Perception = General
PR = Progress
OC = Observational Comparison
SF = Social Feedback
PS = Physiological States

The results indicated that no significant difference was found between students' self-perceptions as readers by group (general, social feedback, observational comparison, physiological states, & progress) and their reading definitions.

The multivariate comparison of the self-perceptions as readers groups on the reading definitions' groups was not significant F(15,431) = .92, NS. The results of the univariate group comparisons are presented in Table 11. No significant differences were found.

General Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine whether third-grade students' reading definitions and self-perceptions as readers were related to word recognition and reading

comprehension. In addition, this study examined whether students' reading definitions and self-perceptions as readers were related to their tendency to exhibit learning difficulties (i.e., inability to read--dyslexia).

Reading Definitions: Learning to Read

In order to assess third grade students' reading definitions, a two-part reading questionnaire was designed to elicit responses to questions related to their definitions of reading and to their perceptions about learning to read. The results of this study present somewhat of a paradoxical picture regarding students' comprehension performance and their reading definitions. Some findings, particularly those from quantitative measures, suggested that students' comprehension performance is related to their reading definitions (skills, combination, meaning, & other). For the students who defined reading as a combination of word recognition and meaning, the results were significantly different for comprehension performance as measured by the Analytical Reading Inventory (ARI) than those measured by the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS). However, the definitions of students who defined reading as strictly a phonics and word recognition skill, comprehension, or who held no definite definition of reading, were not related to comprehension performance, as measured by the Analytical Reading Inventory (ARI) or the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS). Also, findings regarding third grade students' reading definitions were not related to reading comprehension performance on the ITBS, regardless of the format used for assessing comprehension (i.e., selected- or constructed-response items). It is important to note that for this population of third grade students, the findings indicated that very few would be considered proficient with regard to reading. In fact, the majority of the population was still operating somewhere along the "learning to read" continuum and most often at the

beginning of that continuum (i.e., beginning reading).

Qualitative findings also indicated that students' reading definitions are related to their comprehension performance. Approximately two-thirds of the third-grade population in this study was able to articulate a definition of reading. These findings suggest that students' reading comprehension may be influenced by their reading definitions.

Interestingly, for a small population of third grade students, their reading definitions indicated that they view reading as a combination of word identification and comprehending, albeit an interactive perception. This definition of reading is supported by the interactive model of reading posited by David Rumelhart (as cited in Pearson, 1984a; as cited in Ruddell, Ruddell, & Singer, 1994). These findings have instructional implications for both third grade classroom teachers and early childhood and elementary preservice teachers. Based on the results of this study, it appears that third grade students would benefit from: (a) teacher awareness of students' definitions of reading and (b) instruction that includes both word recognition and comprehension skills along with metacognition strategies. For students who view reading other than as an interactive model of reading, instruction in word recognition, comprehension skills, and metacognition strategies would also reinforce and/or augment their understanding of reading.

Additional implications for both classroom teachers and early childhood and elementary preservice teachers may be derived from students' reading definitions. While a majority of third grade students stated a definition of reading, a large portion of that population offered no definition or offered one that did not fit within the categories of phonics and word recognition, combination, or meaning. It appears that students, who hold no definition of reading, would benefit from classroom discussions which focus on: (a) what reading is, (b) the author's implied

message, and (c) reading as meaning-making.

How students learned to read was explored in the second part of the Reading Questionnaire (RQ) by asking how the third grade students how they believed that they learned to read. This question was added because research identified word recognition and comprehension performances as two important skills necessary to master when learning to read. An examination of the data revealed that the majority of third grade students believed that they learned to read through the direct influence of an adult (parent, teacher, or grandparent) or older siblings. Such a finding suggests that third grade students perceive reading as a social, communication process which requires interaction with an adult or older sibling. This finding is supported by research which asserts that: (a) a home environment which fosters reading is important for a student to become an effective reader (May, 1994; Reutzel & Cooter, 1992; Routman, 1988, 1991; Smith, 1994; Weaver, 1990, 1994a), and (b) a classroom environment that promotes reading is the sole responsibility of the classroom teacher (Borko & Eisenhart, 1986; Weaver, 1994b), who is the key factor in students' perceptions of reading regardless of the materials used for reading instruction.

The implications of such findings for classroom teachers and parents of third grade students are clear as teachers and parents must perceive themselves as an integral part of students' reading progress. Further implications suggest the need for establishing a positive relationship between home and school. Such a relationship may be fostered through parental involvement by (a) training volunteer parents as aides, (b) preparing easy-to-read books, (c) playing games, (d) presenting good reading models, and (e) providing a selection of parental brochures to assist with reading in the home (May, 1994). This kind of cooperative effort will

provide a positive motivation and model for students as they learn to read.

Word Recognition

Third graders' word recognition performance, as measured by the Slosson's Oral Reading Test (SORT), was not impacted by their reading definitions (skills, combination, meaning, & other). This finding suggests that third grade students' reading definitions and self-perceptions have little effect on word recognition performance. It appears suggest that third grade students' word recognition performance may be directly related to extrinsic factors (i.e., reading instruction & materials, & students' literacy experiences), suggesting quite possibly that meaningful vocabulary instruction which focuses on the teaching of vocabulary in context would benefit students. These findings support the research conducted by Harmon (1982), Smith (1994), and Wixson and Lipson (1984) which stated that word recognition performance: (a) is not central to comprehension, (b) depends upon the reader's background and the nature of the words, and (c) is successful if the words are high frequency. Research indicates that students' word recognition performance is influenced by (a) the instructional method, (b) the type of reading materials, (c) the syntactic difficulty of the text, (d) the purpose for reading, (e) the passage length, (f) the reader's prior knowledge of the reading material, and (g) the difficulty of the passage (Wixson & Lipson, 1984).

Comprehension

In this study, comprehension was measured by the informal reading assessment, the ARI, and the formal reading assessment, the ITBS. The ARI contains six types of comprehension questions which include (a) literal, (b) inferential, (c) main idea, (d) cause and effect, (e) conclusion drawing, and (f) terminology. The ITBS, a standardized assessment, measures

students' comprehension performance on selected- and constructed-response items.

The findings of this study indicated that third grade students' comprehension was related to their reading definitions but not to their self-perceptions as readers. For the majority of subjects in this study, reading was defined as learning or understanding, which corresponds with the top-down theory of reading. For the rest of the third grade population, some of the subjects defined reading as phonics and word recognition (bottom-up theory), word recognition and meaning (interactive theory), or their definitions of reading did not fit any of the three theoretical models.

These findings have implications for classroom teachers. First, teachers and students would profit from class discussions where they are free to think about and discuss reading. Secondly, students' definitions are directly influenced by the type of instruction they have received and their application of reading strategies. Third, teachers would benefit from the realization that their reading instruction depends on their own definitions of reading. These findings are supported by research conducted by Weaver (1994a) and Borko and Eisenhart (1986) that examined teachers' definitions of reading and the type of reading instruction implemented in the classroom. Last, ultimately students' definitions of reading were the key factor for their comprehension performance.

It is important to note that the third grade students who participated in this study are totally involved in reading to learn, and yet, only a small percentage had moved to that end. The majority of students were still consumed in the task of learning to read. This finding is of particular interest because students in grade three will be expected to have achieved those skills and strategies unique to "reading to learn" by the end of the academic year. This expectation

continues and increases as the students progress through their academic careers. Of additional concern is the realization that almost all standardized assessments used within the context of this study, presupposed that third graders are in the "reading to learn" phase rather than being in the "learning to read" phase.

It was interesting to note the positive attitude exhibited by the students when requested to complete the word recognition (SORT) and comprehension (ARI) assessments, and the reading questionnaire (RQ) with the principal investigator. Students were eager to participate in the assessment sessions. Students who had participated in the assessment session would announce to the next participant that he or she would have fun when it was their turn to complete the assessment tasks. Students who had not experienced the assessment session would often ask if they were next. The principal investigator was frequently asked to have the assessment session repeated by those students who had completed the assessments. At no time did any of the students express any reluctance or unwillingness to participate in the assessment sessions or to complete the assessment tasks.

The students' positive attitudes expressed verbally and in their willingness to cooperate suggest that students will complete assignments, including assessments, if they understand the purpose of the assignment or task and can experience individualized attention in a nonthreatening environment. These observations are supported by Weaver (1994a), May (1994), and Smith (1994), who have stated that students learn best in a classroom where individuals are taught in a stimulating environment by teachers who (a) model interest in the student, (b) express good student expectations, (c) express encouragement for all students, and (d) adhere to an eclectic format of reading instruction. In addition, May (1994) further suggests that teaching students to

read in a learning environment that features cooperation, trust, and respect for one another enhances the readers' purpose for reading, and, ultimately, allows students to become skillful at reading.

Self-Perceptions as Readers

In this study, third grade students' self-perceptions as readers were examined to determine whether self-perceptions are related to their comprehension performance. The results of this study indicate that readers' self-perceptions do not influence comprehension performance.

As previously stated, third grade students' reading definitions and their learning to read perceptions were hypothesized to be important aspects of the reading process. However, until recently, students' self-perceptions as readers have not been considered an important indicator of successful academic achievement or potential (Blumenfeld, Pintrich, Meece, & Wessels, 1982; Borko & Eisenhart, 1986; Henk & Melnick, 1995; Marshall & Weinstein, 1984; Mitman & Lash, 1988). Research conducted by Stipek and Weisz (1981) and Marshall and Weinstein (1984) suggested that students' personality, motivation, and achievement are related to academic performance. In the study reported here, those students who had high self-perception and attitude scores related to their reading abilities tended to have low scores in comprehension performance. The results of the current study present an interesting scenario regarding third grade students' self-perceptions as readers and their comprehension performance. This finding leads to the conclusion that third grade students who participated in this study perceive themselves as good readers, even when their comprehension performance was low, which was possibly due to the fact that these students tended to define reading as "fun," "exercises," or "worksheets." It appears that for the portion of the third-grade population that held no definite definition of reading, their

comprehension performance was consistently the lowest when the mean scores are examined for each assessment of their comprehension performance. This result leads to the conclusion that for this portion of the population their comprehension performance and definitions of reading are of little importance, since they fail to understand the connection between phonics, word recognition, comprehension, and reading. To reiterate, it is imperative for these students, who hold no reading definition, that classroom discussions focus on: (a) what reading is, (b) the author's implied message, and (c) reading as meaning-making.

In addition, this study examined whether third grade students' self-perceptions as readers were indicators of students' tendencies to exhibit learning difficulties (i.e., inability to read--dyslexia). The results of this study indicate that third grade students' self-perceptions did influence their tendency to exhibit learning difficulties, as reflected in their personal attitudes toward progress in reading, their emotional status, and their personal perceptions of themselves as readers. It should be noted, however, that the relationship was a negative one and that positive self-perceptions resulted in a greater tendency to exhibit learning difficulties because the students thought their reading was better than their comprehension performance indicated. In addition, the results of this study indicate that third grade students' self-perceptions did not influence their tendency to exhibit learning difficulties, as reflected by their perceptions of peer evaluations, and their beliefs about the ways that family, peers, and teachers perceive them. This information leads to the conclusion that some students, who exhibit a tendency toward learning difficulties (i.e., inability to read--dyslexia), are influenced by those factors that consider their (a) reading ability perceptions (i.e., general); for example, I think I am a good reader; (b) their feelings regarding reading (i.e., physiological states); for example, I like to read aloud; and (c) their reading

progress (i.e., progress); for example, I read better than I could before. In addition, this information leads to the conclusion that some students, who exhibit a tendency toward learning difficulties, are influenced by those factors that consider (a) social feedback from their peers, classroom teacher, and family; for example, My classmates like to listen to me read; and, (b) observational comparison with their peers; for example, I read faster than other kids.

Students' self-perceptions regarding learning disabilities posits an interesting dilemma. The World Federation of Neurology has defined a learning disability as "a disorder manifested by difficulty in learning to read despite conventional instruction, adequate intelligence, and socioeconomic opportunity. It is dependent upon fundamental cognitive disabilities which are of constitutional (emotional or neurological) origin" (Critchley, as cited in Weaver, 1994a, p. 479). In essence, this finding supports the definition of a learning disability as constitutional (emotional) in origin, thus, the results agree with the idea that students' tendencies to exhibit learning difficulties are constitutional in origin. However, upon close examination of the screening device used to identify students' with possible learning difficulties (i.e., learning difficulties [failed] or no learning difficulties [passed]), very few items dealt with specific reading skills. Rather, the items addressed behaviors other than reading, such as, time-on-task, emotional factors, testing abilities, following directions, personal responsibility, memory, and writing. Given that state and federal agencies define learning difficulties as cognitive disabilities which are of constitutional (emotional or neurological) origin, it is a fallacy to conclude that students' tendencies to exhibit learning disabilities can be identified by one screening device, which discriminates between students who display those characteristics and students who do not. However, one additional consideration must be that all children come to school wanting to read;

therefore, their emotional status is very positive. Then, one may ask what produces this change in students' tendencies to exhibit learning disabilities (i.e., inability to read--dyslexia) when their emotional status remains positive?

Two possible answers to this complex question are the type of reading instruction that is implemented and the instructional environment itself. In a study conducted by Thames and Reeves (1994), the researchers examined students' self-perceptions regarding literacy (i.e., reading, writing, speaking, listening, & thinking). Their findings suggested that students' self-perceptions as learners were directly related to progress in their literacy skills, especially when an integrated curriculum approach (i.e., a concept-based reading approach taught in a literacy setting across the curriculum) is adopted. As mentioned before, other researchers support an integrated curriculum because the source of instruction begins with the students' interests, needs, problems, issues, and concerns (Beane, 1995; Smith, 1979; Strickland & Morrow, 1990). Therefore, when an integrated curriculum is implemented, it allows students to (a) make the connection between their social and physical world, (b) communicate using written and oral formats, and (c) exercise critical thinking in a stimulating environment that is meaning-saturated.

In order to maintain students' positive emotional status, the classroom environment is paramount. May (1994) suggests that "a classroom learning environment where students are (a) perceived as readers and learners, (b) encouraged to collaborate with their peers, and (c) provided with abundant opportunities for practicing respect, trust, and cooperation" (p.71), are just as important as the instructional methods used in the classroom.

Conclusion

When taking into account the generalizability of the results of this study, the following

limitations should be considered. This study was restricted to an entire third grade population in eight self-contained classrooms at a K-4 elementary school. The subjects consisted of general education students from predominantly low- to middle-income families.

Varied assessment formats were used in this study, which included: formal and informal measures, oral, and selected- and constructed-response items for comprehension and word recognition performances. Although these assessment formats measure the comprehension and word recognition performances, the subjects may not have been familiar with the assessment formats.

Another limitation may be attributed to the instrument that measured students' self-perceptions as readers. The original instrument was designed for students in grades 4-6; however, this instrument was administered to third grade students. Students in grades 4-6 were requested to read independently each item and to rate their level of agreement with each statement. In this study, the students had difficulty understanding the instructions and reading each item in the readers' self-perception scale. To ensure consistency, all directions and instrument items were read aloud to the students.

Another limitation to consider is that the screening device used to identify third grade students' tendency to exhibit learning difficulties (i.e., learning disabilities [failed] or no learning disabilities [passed]) may not have been comprehensive enough. The DSI used a self-reporting format which each classroom teacher completed. The screening device examined general student behaviors, but it only addressed a few specific reading behaviors and a few specific components of the reading process. In addition, the DSI did not provide normative, reliability, nor construct-validity data, yet this screening device is recommended to identify students with possible

learning difficulties. Results of this study may have differed if another screening device that measures reading behaviors and the reading process had been used.

In terms of future research, no studies have been conducted that focus on students' reading definitions, particularly their definitions related to reading comprehension and word recognition. While this study examined third grade students' reading definitions and self-perceptions as readers, teachers' reading definitions were not considered in relation to their students' definitions. Future research needs to focus on examining the relationship between teachers' and students' reading definitions regarding students' comprehension and word recognition performances. In addition, students' reading definitions were limited to third grade subjects. Future research needs to focus on students' reading definitions as students progress from learning to read to reading to learn.

The findings of this study raise some interesting questions regarding the role of students perceptions as it relates to reading achievement. For example, do positive self-perceptions grow out of the fact that students do not accurately perceive their comprehension performance, or have the educational systems over-emphasized a positive self-perception to the detriment of students' reading comprehension? As a result, teachers have not given equal concern to helping students see specifically how and what they need to do to read.

Summary

In summary, results tend to support the conclusion that assessments used to evaluate third graders focus on the "reading to learn" aspect and, yet, by third grade students are still learning "how" to read. In addition, findings further support the conclusion that informal measures, such as the ARI, may be better indicators of actual student comprehension performance than are

formal measures. It appears that decisions about reading instruction and assessment should rest with the classroom teacher, whose knowledge of students' strengths and weaknesses guides the selection of appropriate instruction and assessment procedures.

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